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September 2008 Newsletter

Pragmatic Decisions in Equal Rights: History of an African-American Community in Jo Daviess County, Illinois

By Marty Wild

Many historians, avocational and professional, have written articles and books concerning the mining town of Galena, Illinois, and the surrounding county of Jo Daviess. Some studies offer simple narratives glorifying the prominent citizens of the past, while other works ask bigger questions and answer them with more detailed analysis. With the exception of Scott Wolfe, few historians have discussed the small African-American population that once lived and worked throughout this area during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, even the most obscure histories have a way of manifesting themselves in the present. For example, about thirty miles east of Galena lies the rural township of Rush. Throughout this vicinity, one finds several landmarks that carry the memory of those who once lived there. With these markers comes a dying history of the African-American experience in Jo Daviess. Just ask some of the local farmers in Rush and many will tell old stories using the racial epithet of “N----r Creek” and describe the small community of African Americans who once lived in the area farming and smelting lime. They may also add a few words about the old “Equal Rights” schoolhouse, where fighting broke out between local white and black populations over who had the right to the education it offered. This, however, is where the local oral history ends, leaving many unanswered questions as to who these people were and why they chose to reside and work there.

Aside from the remnants of a few old lime kilns and an abandoned schoolhouse, these local tales are all that remains of this forgotten community. There are no records or letters written by its inhabitants. It might seem that Equal Rights was nothing more than an insignificant moment in the past of Jo Daviess. However, these stories are much more than just tatters of oral history passed around by local farmers. The heritage of this past community is embedded in the dynamic repercussions of local and national histories coupled with the practical

decisions of these people trying to live their lives. What some locals call Equal Rights is the manifestation of something far more complex that reveals part of the whole experience encountered by the African Americans who once lived in this economically promising county.



Locations of Galena and the nearby Equal Rights settlement.

This study dedicates itself to uncovering the details of this small African-American community. I hope to answer several questions about the settlement. Why did a small group of African Americans leave the city of Galena in the late 1850s to settle nearby in agriculturally based Rush township? What was the African-American experience like in both Galena and the community? What does the fading oral history of the region tell us today about Equal Rights, and how does it compare with other sources of information concerning this topic? What events occurred in Rush township that changed a few neighboring families into a community? In the end, the ultimate purpose of this article is to recover an aspect of the history of this region of



1946 aerial photograph of the agricultural landscape in which the Equal Rights settlement site is located. Image courtesy U.S. Geological Survey.

northern Illinois that might otherwise be nothing more than a derogatory nickname for a local landmark.

In order to ascertain why the founders of Equal Rights left the more opportune city of Galena for the rural township of Rush, one must begin with a study of that city's economy and society. European settlement of Galena began with French exploration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their influence was visible during the nineteenth century as well. For instance, although today we call the local river the Galena, citizens once called this waterway the Fever, an English manipulation of "feve," the French word for bean. The first substantial influx of settlers, however, did not begin until the 1820s. Settlement was initially sporadic and slow, but after the 1830s Galena's population continued to grow for the next twenty years. This was in large part the result of both a healthy national economy and relief from the threat of conflict with

Native Americans. By 1850, the total population of Galena was 6,000 and four years later, it doubled, reaching 12,000.

Lead mining was the key to both Galena and Jo Daviess County's primary growth and success. It was not the area's only economic lure, for the river trade and agriculture also created commercial opportunities. With them, Galena attracted a variety of immigrants. Europeans such as Germans, Welsh, Irish, French, and English all called Galena home. Krause (1980) notes that as the city's population grew a dividing social order evolved. French and Scottish immigrants found their way into Galena's commercial community and the Irish were successful in the county's agricultural fields. In addition, according to Williams (1941), only the Irish and Welsh came for reasons other than individual: the Irish immigration due to famine in their homeland as well as English oppression, and the Welsh due to the declining production of lead in their native soil.

Foreign immigrants were not the only settlers to nineteenth century Galena. Many New Englanders and Southerners also found their way into the city during these early boom years. The New England population certainly brought a lot with them, although their greatest contributions were to Galena's mercantile economy. The Southern influence was stronger and manifested itself in a number of places throughout Galena. According to Williams (1941), the *Daily Advertiser* quoted Southern newspapers on numerous occasions and often agreed with Southern political views. Galena architecture was also a product of Southern design.

The South's dominant influence upon Galena, however, was the presence of African Americans in the city. During the early days of settlement, enslaved African Americans from the South played an important role in Galena's development. According to one academic study, there were close to 150 slaves working the Johnson mine as early as 1823. Another early mining settlement consisted of an owner and twenty of his enslaved laborers. Additionally, courthouse files from 1830 record the sale of a nineteen-year-old African-American girl and her two-year-old baby. Although the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 restricted the practice of bondage in the Northwest Territory, slavery survived in Galena for decades thereafter, with some slave owners avoiding new laws by listing their slaves as servants.

Despite the existence of slavery, many African Americans saw Galena as a prospect for freedom. In the early 1830s, Swansy Adams arrived in the city as an enslaved laborer. Adam's owner interrupted his tenure in the city when he forcibly brought Adams to St. Louis. Fellow

Galenian William Hempstead found his way to Missouri soon after, where he purchased Adams. Hempstead then brought the man back to the city and allowed Adams to purchase his own freedom upon their arrival. Samuel Hughlett was another who practiced emancipation, freeing all twenty of the enslaved persons he had inherited from his father.

With freedom came the chance for Galena's African-American population to take advantage of the economic opportunities that the mining community offered. Many blacks worked as miners or laborers with the river industry. Additionally, some found work as cooks in hotels or as servants for the local bourgeoisie. Other African Americans supported themselves as barbers, gardeners, or bricklayers while some were occasionally self-employed. A. H. Richardson, for example, owned his own blacksmith shop.

Galena was not a paradise for free blacks. Despite the opportunities, the city's African-American population experienced prejudice from both outside and inside Galena. The case of Jerry Boyd offers an extreme example of racist forces that all nineteenth century free blacks in America had to contend with. In the fall of 1860, a man calling himself Jo Wilder arrived in Galena searching out African-American laborers interested in new economic opportunities. Learning of the news, Jerry Boyd, a miner and day laborer, decided to take his family and travel with Mr. Wilder to Des Moines, Iowa. In truth, Wilder was not interested in the advancement of anyone other than himself. He was a man named John Gooden who, with the assistance of his father-in-law, had lured several free blacks to Missouri. Promising economic opportunity, the two sold those who followed into bondage. This was to be the case with Jerry Boyd and his family. Boyd realized something was wrong with his situation, and confronted Gooden on the issue. Feeling threatened by the man's challenge, Gooden murdered Boyd. In the end, authorities arrested John Gooden in Missouri. Thankfully, Boyd's wife Mary and the couple's children escaped with their lives.

Prejudice manifested itself from within Galena as well. In 1867 several members of the Freedman's Aid Society managed to open an all-black school in Galena. As the school opened and classes commenced a group of youths began bombarding the schoolhouse with rocks, brickbats, and rotten eggs. This, unfortunately, was not a single occurrence but continued to transpire over several weeks. In addition to physically attacking the building, these menaces verbally harassed the white schoolteachers as they walked home from their classes. A man even

took time to call upon the school directors to find out why the city allowed African Americans to use the school building.

Less prominent examples of prejudice also appeared throughout Galena society during this period. In 1870, the *Advertiser* ran an article that reported of a black man who ran for office in the city government. For the most part the piece was nondiscriminatory. However, the piece ends with a rather narrow-minded comment: “It is most cruel in our anti-bond friends to desert their standard bearer on the battlefield and join the colored forces. But white men are sometimes mighty on-sartin.” The *Galena Daily Advertiser* was a Republican newspaper and often boasted to be the friend of the African-American community, but as this article demonstrates, they too expressed their own prejudice against blacks. Furthermore, during the height of Galena’s politically induced newspaper war, the editor of the *Advertiser* stated in the defense of Republican ideology that although African Americans are human beings they are regarded as “mentally, socially, and politically beneath the whites.”

The role of religion in African-American history has been examined as a central theme by historians. Sylvia Frey argues in her study of Revolutionary era slave resistance, *Water from the Rock*, that the spread of evangelical religion to both slaves and free blacks was a major consequence of the colonies’ war for independence. Frey makes clear the attractiveness of religion to African Americans confronting Southern slavery. A number of other studies have also concentrated on the topic of African-American Christianity. Harry Richardson’s *Dark Salvatio* offers a comprehensive history of African-American Methodism. James Lewis’s study, *Religious Life of Fugitive Slaves and Rise of Coloured Baptist Churches*, discusses the central role of Baptist religion in the rhetoric of escaped slaves within the networks of the Underground Railroad and in their Canadian settlements thereafter.

Religion flourished during the early years of Galena. Although nineteenth-century travelers made comments on the city’s lack of piety, the city was dotted with denominations and churches. The city built its first church in 1833. By 1849, city directories listed eleven operating church organizations in Galena, two of which served the city’s African Americans. The first black denomination to establish in the city was the Colored Union Baptist in 1842. Although Galena had already erected a Baptist church building, this denomination met at a structure known as the academy. This racial segregation, however, may have been the result of denominational circumstances rather than prejudice. It is unclear exactly who established this

church, but sources suggest that it may have been Preacher Henry Smith. A year later, another group of blacks founded the African Episcopal Methodist Church.

Today we know little about the African-American churches of Galena. It is clear that although separate African-American denominations existed, some Christian blacks did not always attend them. The Galena Public Library has cataloged several cases of African-American weddings at the predominantly white First Presbyterian Church. The library also cataloged three weddings that took place at the African Baptist church. Galena's black churches were often short-lived organizations. As the economy faltered and the total population of Galena diminished, the African-American population declined dramatically and left these congregations empty. The Colored Union Baptist Church closed sometime between 1855 and 1858 as the impacts of an economic slowdown became apparent. The African Episcopal Methodist Church finally closed its doors in the 1860s.

Preacher Henry Smith was one of many African Americans who arrived in Galena during these early years of growth, experiencing these economic opportunities, prejudicial drawbacks, and multitude of Christian denominations. He would be one of the first African Americans to leave the city and settle in nearby Rush Township. The earliest record of Smith in Galena appears in an 1848 city directory. However, investigations conducted by the Primitive Baptist Library in Carthage, Illinois, approximates Smith's arrival to be either 1842 or 1843 with the opening of the Colored Union Baptist Church. Henry Smith did not occupy many jobs during his stay in Galena. The 1849 city directory listed him as the pastor of the Colored Union Baptist Church. Little changed with the preacher during the following years, although directories did not list Smith's occupation as the Union Baptists pastor, they nevertheless listed him as a preacher. After the closing of the Colored Baptist Church, the 1858 directory reported a change in the occupation of Henry Smith from preacher to laborer. Walter Baker was another prominent player in the story of the Equal Rights settlement in Rush township. He too found his way to Galena during its prosperous mid-nineteenth century years. The earliest records of him in the area come from the 1854 city directory, which listed his occupation as a miner. According to the directory, Baker also occupied the position of pastor for the Colored Union Baptist Church.

During their time in Galena, the Baptist religion played an important part in the lives of both Henry Smith and Walter Baker. It dominated their lives outside the city as well, for these men participated in a larger group known as the Northwestern Association of the Regular

Predestinarian Baptists (NARPB). It is uncertain why or how these men encountered this denomination, though documents collected by the Primitive Baptist Library reveal some information. The nineteenth-century Baptist publication *Signs of the Times* asserts that Smith first fell into the Baptist light while living in Kentucky. On the other hand, Baker's conversion to the Baptist faith was not as direct. According to his obituary written by fellow Baptist Elder Benjamin Sallee, Walter Baker converted in 1844 and joined a Methodist denomination. Baker soon became dissatisfied with that congregation and joined the Primitive Baptist. In 1850, Robert Jeffers, a white preacher, baptized him.

Smith and Baker's involvement with the NARPB led the men to the local area beyond Galena. According to Association minutes, obituaries, and basic church records collected by the Primitive Baptist Library, both men participated in several churches throughout the county and state. Not only did these men give their time to Galena's Colored Baptist Church but also to the Little Flock church near Scales Mound, Illinois and the Providence church in Lena, Illinois. Their connection to these churches spanned across the state line. Elder Robert Jeffers, the preacher who ordained Baker, was the pastor of several churches in Southern Wisconsin. Additionally, when the Wisconsin church of Mt. Pleasant closed, some members became apart of the New Hope church at Equal Rights. Henry Smith also traveled extensively throughout Illinois preaching his beliefs and occasionally found his way to his former home of St. Louis.

Although segregation existed in the Baptist congregations of Galena, it was absent from the other churches in which Smith and Baker participated. Histories of Wisconsin Primitive Baptist Churches report that the members of these congregations held abolitionist views. African American Baptist did not feel animosity towards whites either. Nineteenth-century Black Baptist literature professed equality and compassion among the races of God. Nor did race inhibit one's role in the church; all Primitive Baptist affiliates actively participated in the organization's major issues. Documents reveal Henry Smith took a dynamic role in the debate over "Two-Seedism," an argument that ultimately led to divisions among the Predestinarian Baptist.

While both Smith and Baker traveled extensively throughout the Midwest countryside, their home was in Galena. However, their stay in the city was short. As the century progressed, developments occurred that changed the structure of the city's economy. This resulted in the alteration of the Galena's population and religious organizations. These factors eventually coalesced and ultimately caused Smith and Baker's emigration from the city.

Galena's early economic prosperity attracted a variety of settlers from different parts of the world. As time advanced this prosperity diminished and the population of the city decreased. Census records report that Galena's population peaked in 1858 with approximately 12,000 people. Twenty years later, this figure dropped to 8,466 and by 1880, it was only 7,849. The economic decline particularly affected the African-American population. In 1840, for example, the total number of black inhabitants was at 126. However, by 1870 after the economic decline, the total black population of Galena was only 64 and by 1880 the census reported that only 13 African Americans lived in the city.

Galena's economic downfall began in the mid-1850s. This commercial decline was the result of a multitude of both local and world developments. The lead mining industry, for example, was hurt by situations in both the Galena mines and those elsewhere. In the early years of growth, profiting from lead mining was much easier than it was by the 1860s. This was partly because prior to the 1850s miners could profit by concentrating their efforts on shallow diggings. The only requirements were a little strength, a few tools, and a minimal amount of capital. As workers exhausted these surface deposits, new mines developed farther beneath the surface. These deeper diggings were less fruitful and demanded harder work and more capital investment, thus resulting in the retardation of the city's mining industry. The national and world lead mining industry also influenced the decline of Galena's mining business. Because of new mines in both Canada and Australia, the world price of lead began falling in 1860. Additionally, the price of lead in New York dropped in the late nineteenth century furthering the demise of the business. With the combination of a reduced world price and the increased cost of local mining, Galena's mining industry, the backbone of the city's commercial success and initial reason for pioneer settlement, faded away.

The decline in lead production damaged Galena's once thriving river trade, for the mineral was one of the city's primary exports. Because of the business community's local autonomy, damage to the trade was initially slow. However, with the Panic of 1857 local merchants who in past times relied on the mining industry during periods of economic instability had nothing to fall back on. Railroads and the Civil War played a significant role in killing the trade as well. Although a sluggish process, competition with the slowly expanding railroad companies impacted the trade flow to the east. Soon war prompted the Confederates to close the

lower Mississippi off and further damaged the water transport industry by breaking Galena's traditional mercantile agreements.

As the economy slowed and the African-American population diminished, Galena's black churches closed their doors. A major catalyst for Smith and Baker's decision to leave the city came when their Colored Union Baptist Church closed in the late 1850s, leaving the two without purpose, for their niche in the city was preaching to the congregation. With their role extinguished, they decided to leave the city. Smith was first, departing at the end of the 1850s. Baker would follow in the later half of the 1860s. Because of their relationship with other Baptist churches in the area, Smith and Baker did not travel far. The location that became Equal Rights was somewhat of a halfway point between the nearby Little Flock Baptist Church in Scales Mound and the Providence Church in Lena, Illinois. The area was also close to the Wisconsin-Illinois border, facilitating communication with the churches located there. Furthermore, the closing of a church in Wisconsin furthered the need of creating a new Baptist church in Jo Daviess County. When Henry Smith and Walter Baker left Galena, they did not go far but to a geographic location that sustained their relationship with the NARPB.

Henry Smith first arrived in Rush Township between 1858 and 1860. Although land records indicate that the preacher first bought land in 1863, the federal census tells us that he had lived in the township since at least 1860. With the preacher came his wife, Leah, and three of their children, Robert, Joseph, and Susan. By 1870, six more people were living with Henry including three more children, a woman by the name of Rosie Pillow, as well as Walter and Elizabeth Baker. Ten years later, this settlement would branch out to about thirty people with over seventy acres of land. In addition to the Smiths and Bakers, several other families settled in the region. Among them was a man named George Washington who lived there with his wife and children and Cebran Jackson who also brought his large family to the area. Then in 1875, Henry Smith passed away. Soon after his widow Leah remarried a man by the name of Hartwell Parrem. The Smith family had grown significantly by Henry's death. Twenty years had passed since he first brought his family of five to Rush and since then this unit had increased to almost fifteen people. A major reason for this increase was that Henry's sons Robert and Joseph had married and reproduced. Of the thirty people who lived here, half were related to Henry.

Kinship and cooperation laid the foundation for life in Equal Rights. Land records left behind by the settlement's inhabitants reflect this. When purchasing new land in the area, the

people of the community did so with the assistance of each other. For instance in 1869, George Washington found a home in Rush and purchased fifteen acres with Henry Smith's son Robert. The following year Robert bought an additional five acres with his brother Joseph. The brothers purchased another forty acres a year and later left Washington the sole owner of the land he initially purchased with Robert Smith. In 1874, the influx of African Americans continued, and the Smiths sold their first five-acre purchase to Cebran Jackson. As time passed, Robert and Joseph began dividing their forty acres among themselves and others. The land, however, always stayed in the hands of their family. By 1876 their forty acres had split into three parcels; Joseph obtained twenty while Robert and their mother Leah each took ten. Though Walter Baker bought land without assistance, Census record indicate he lived on Henry Smith's land for at least eight years prior to his purchase of ten acres in the late 1870s. The people of Equal Rights did not buy the land arbitrarily; they did so with planning and assistance. Although the creation of community may not have been their intent, the cooperation and help they gave to each other during their time in Jo Daviess created bonds that took on the structure of community. Out of their pragmatic decisions came something more. This spirit of community would continue to strengthen in reaction to forces and actions outside of Equal Rights as well.

The late 1870s and early 1880s was the peak of Equal Rights. Although the 1880s saw much of the land these families bought sold to local whites, it did not mean that the blacks left the area entirely. For instance, it appears Henry lived in Rush prior to owning land; thus it is probable that many continued to live in the area after selling their land. It is entirely possible that some families rented the land they lived on. The 1890s, however, saw a significant drop in the community's population. After Robert was ordained as a minister, he moved to Clinton, Iowa to start a new Baptist Church. This venture was short-lived, however, for Robert died in 1892. George Washington also moved his family to Clinton. During the same decade death would take several others of Equal Rights, including Leah and Mary Smith as well as Walter Baker. By 1900, the population of what was Equal Rights had dropped to seven. All that remained was the family of Joseph Smith. Ten years later, nothing would remain of the community.

Information regarding what life was like in this small settlement is limited. However, a letter from *Signs of the Times* offers some information. According to this correspondence, Henry Smith along with several other African-Americans families living in the Equal Rights

community made a living through agriculture and smelting limestone. According to historian Scott Wolfe, remnants of the lime kilns can still be observed on private agricultural property near Wolf Creek on the site of the Equal Rights settlement. It is unknown how much revenue Smith and his neighbors brought in from such ventures, but it is clear that they were making enough money to buy land.



**Scott Wolfe next to lime kiln remains.
Photograph courtesy Philip Millhouse.**

Initial settlement in Rush Township was primarily the result of religious affiliation. Not surprisingly, worship continued in importance after the establishment of the community. The New Hope church came into existence in Equal Rights during the 1870s. Although the Primitive Baptist Library is uncertain who began this congregation it is safe to assume that Smith, Baker, or both were the architects. Other local pastors were involved in the church as well. Members of New Hope came from various areas in the region. The religious spirit passed onto Henry's children; both Joseph and Robert became ministers. The spirit did not leave Henry's wife, Leah, after the pastor's death either, for she remarried H. Parrem, another member of the Primitive Baptist congregation from Wisconsin.

Today, there is little physically left of Equal Rights, just an old school house and remnants of the stone limekilns on the banks of a nearby creek. There is persistence in the memory of this community, however, that gives clues its past. Scattered across the Rush

countryside lay several landmarks that have taken on some historically revealing nicknames. Take Wolf Creek, for example, this small stream meandered along the property of Robert and Joseph Smith and served as the location of their lime smelting operations. However, local farmers do not know this place by its proper name, but instead as “N----r Creek.” There are more of these derogatory names scattered throughout the region.

Few in the area do not know why these places have the derogatory nicknames. Local historian Bob Klechner, a Jo Daviess County resident of seventy-seven years, is one who of few who remember the tales of Equal Rights from his childhood. According to this oral history, an African-American man known as Preacher Henry Smith in the accompaniment of his wife and children relocated from Galena to Rush Township in the early 1860s. As time passed, more African Americans joined Preacher Henry and by 1880, according to Klechner, the population reached about twenty-five. It was sometime between 1870 and 1880 that the area’s entire population reached such a level to warrant the building of a rural schoolhouse. As Bob recalls, there was resentment from the local white farmers towards the idea of blacks attending this school with their children. This resentment resulted in an armed conflict that supposedly left someone injured. The farmers then began referring to the area and schoolhouse as “N----r Ville.” Eventually, locals officially named the school Equal Rights.

Although these nicknames and oral histories do not of tell a definitive past, they, nevertheless reveal something about this history. It may never be known as to whether or not a violent fight broke out between the blacks and whites of Rush township, for there has yet to be documents found referring to such an incident. What these histories convey, however, are aspects of the African-American experience in the county that we do not find elsewhere. Although the violence is uncertain, we do know that there was a section of the local white population who were not in accord with their black neighbors. Therefore, these nicknames and oral histories tell only the negative aspects of this experience. If we combine these stories and lingering epithets with evidence from available sources, we begin to see something different. This conflict may have resulted in the conception of the settlement as a community, according to Mr. Klechner’s history it was after this supposed clash that locals began referring to both the school and the area itself as a community. Therefore, it may be that Henry Smith and his neighbors did not necessarily view their establishment as a community and that it was the prejudice locals imposed on them that enforced the communal concept. As the years passed, the

concept of community firmly settled into their minds. An 1872 letter printed in *Signs of the Times* briefly described Henry Smith's character and informed the publication's readers that the preacher had currently been living in a community known as "Equal Rights." The letter also mentioned some of the derogatory names by which locals referred to the community. It is doubtful that the author of this letter spoke with any of the prejudiced neighbors. The writer very likely gathered the information presented in the article from either Henry Smith himself or someone familiar with him. The African Americans in Rush Township embraced, accepted, and maintained the concept of community, though it was possibly partly the invention of local prejudice.

In addition, this oral history can mislead some to think that all the whites in the area held prejudices towards the local African Americans. This was not true. Although this history does reveal the tension felt between some of the local whites and blacks, other sources reveal another side to this story. It is true that racial segregation existed among the churches of Galena including the Baptist Church Baker and Smith belonged to, but their participation in the larger Primitive Baptist organization outside of Galena was not subject to segregated settings. Minutes kept from NARPB meetings show Smith contributing to this larger and predominantly white group. Additionally, white preachers baptized and ordained some of those at Equal Rights. Elder Robert Jeffers baptized Walter Baker before the community's birth and Elder Benjamin Sallee did the same for Robert Smith in the 1870s. During the 1890s, Elders Benjamin Sallee, W.A Thompson, and Thomas Davey ordained Joseph Smith with a white man named Lafayette Chaddock. Furthermore, Benjamin Sallee, the white pastor who baptized Robert Smith and ordained Joseph Smith, wrote all of the available obituaries for those who lived at Equal Rights. Although this tiny African American community experienced prejudice, it also knew co-existence.

African-American cities, towns, and communities were a common occurrence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These establishments were by no means universal in their structure either. They differed in location, size, and purpose. Brooklyn, Illinois, for example, was a traditionally structured city complete with a functional government and almost 1,000 African American inhabitants. However, several agriculturally based black communities in Loudoun County, Virginia were quite different, and no more than several families populated these places at a single time nor did they develop a functioning government. Different studies

over the years have produced several theories regarding the functions these communities played for the African-American populations that resided there. For example, according to William and Jane Pease in their study, *Black Utopia*, black communities functioned as a temporary home for African Americans to learn to make their way in American society and negotiate within its morals, virtues, and prejudices. On the other hand, historian Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua borrows the theories of sociologist Mozel C. Hill for his argument that these communities functioned to separate their inhabitants from the dominant white society. Norman L. Crockett offers another view in his study, *The Black Towns*, where the creation of all black communities was an alternative response to other methods for improvement of the African-American experience. The ultimate purpose according to Crockett was self-segregation in order to overcome or at least to forget the oppressive difficulties the dominant society imposed on the minority.

Equal Rights, however, did not fall into any of these categories. It was the pragmatic creation of the circumstances that surrounded the lives of those who resided there. The declining economy of Galena instigated many of that city's inhabitants to emigrate. The faltering situation, coupled with local prejudice, especially induced many African Americans to leave the city. Most important in Walter Baker and Henry Smith's decision to depart was their religion. Their lives in Galena centered on their involvement with Galena's Colored Union Baptist Church. The church closed in the late 1850s, terminating Smith and Baker's primary function in the city, and thus leaving little reason for them to stay. Their involvement with the NARPB, however, provided ample reason for the men to stay in the region. The key motivation for Henry Smith and later Walter Baker to move their families to Rush Township was its central location to the network of Baptist Churches with which these men participated. Rush facilitated travel and communication to area towns, such as Lena and Scales Mound in Illinois, where the NARPB was present, more so than Galena did. Furthermore, as a Baptist church closed along the Wisconsin-Illinois border north of Warren, the church's former congregation created the need for a new church in the area; the New Hope Church in Equal Rights satisfied this need. When Henry Smith decided to leave Galena for the rural township of Rush he was not attempting to found a community that tried to solve the problems African Americans faced during the nineteenth century (although it is possible that Equal Rights did ease some of the bitter realities blacks endured during the period.) Equal Rights did not primarily function to instruct black individuals on the vicissitudes of white society, nor was it an alternative response to improve the

situations of the black experience in America. It was the sensible product of these people's lives. Individuals were devoted to their religion and thus lived in accordance to those beliefs and practices.

Equal Rights did not become a community overnight. This was an evolving process dependent on the circumstances that existed in the settlement. In 1860, what became Equal Rights was nothing more than Henry Smith, his wife, and children living on a farm in the Jo Daviess County countryside. However, time would witness more families arriving in the area and as this occurred these people began to create bonds of kinship and cooperation. Kinship provided the preliminary glue that created, expanded, and held the community together. Equal Rights was not composed of individuals but large families. The Smiths, Bakers, Washingtons, and Jackson were all large households that went beyond the conventional notion of the nuclear family. The area's land records indicate the dual ownership of property by those living in Equal Rights suggesting the kinship and cooperative based nature of the settlement inside and outside the bonds of family. Prejudice too was a source of community. When local whites objected to these African-American families utilizing a school along with white children, they imposed an idea of difference and of a demographic unit larger than just several families living in close proximity. Additionally, the situation in Galena not only instigated but also maintained the notion of community. Why would an African American choose to live in Galena during the 1870s and 1880s when the economy had slowed and little was left of the city's African-population? As the number of African Americans in Rush rose, the number in Galena lessened, attenuating all ties the city had with this satellite community. By 1880, Equal Rights had the highest African-American population in Jo Daviess County, becoming an island. It not only reflected the history of Galena's days of prosperity, but it also evolved into something uniquely its own. Equal Rights was a combination of a multiple factors but most importantly, it was people going through life the best they could.

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